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9. Conclusion

Theoretical Reflections on the Franco-Mauritian Case

As this historico-anthropological study has shown, the Franco-Mauritians have remained very much an elite. They may see this differently themselves, however, since ‘elite’ is a term of reference rather than one of self-reference (Marcus 1983: 9). Yet I consider the term justified because Franco-Mauritians still occupy important ‘commanding positions’ in parts of the private sector and ‘share a variety of interests arising from similarities of training, experience, public duties, and [especially] way of life’ (Cohen 1981: xvi). As a social group they have privileged access to the labour market and control important economic resources such as land, which can be mobilised in the exercise of power (cf. Woods 1998: 2108). In contrast to the situation in the colonial past, however, the Franco-Mauritians are no longer a ‘ruling class’ (Dogan 2003a). They now mainly constitute a socio-economic elite and are part of a wider range of ‘functional’ elites (cf. Dogan 2003b: 1; Shore 2002: 4), these including the newly emerged political and business elites. In this respect the Mauritian setting has fundamentally changed in the sense that prolonging their position at the top has not been an inevitable outcome for the Franco-Mauritians.

As will be recalled, the central research question to be addressed by this thesis was as follows:

What challenges to their dominant position do the Franco-Mauritian elite in Mauritius face and via which social, political, economic and discursive practices have they met these challenges in order to achieve continuity of their position?

Below I will set out the answer(s) to this question. Firstly, I will briefly recapitulate what challenges Franco-Mauritians have faced. Secondly, the different practices that they have adopted to resist these challenges will be discussed. And thirdly, I will explain the results, contextualise their practices and then use them as a basis for reflecting on elite theory.

9.1 Facing Challenges

Since their firm establishment in the early nineteenth century, the Franco-Mauritians have faced numerous challenges to their position and status. While some of these, such as the abolition of slavery in particular (see Chapter Three), were greatly feared they proved to not actually be too harmful for the Franco-Mauritians. Others were not directly perceived as a threat but did challenge their position in the long run, at least when viewed in retrospect. For example, with the arrival of large numbers of indentured labourers (a phenomenon prompted by the abolition of slavery) Mauritians of Indian origin soon came to outnumber other Mauritians. Global developments should, with respect to this, also be taken into consideration because they significantly impacted on the consolidation of elite positions and possibly even played a decisive role in change. As Scott has argued, globalisation had a notable impact on the decline of the British financial elite in the City of London (Scott 2003). In Mauritius the *Grand Morcellement* that was set in motion as a result of plunging sugar prices on the world market (see Chapter Three) demonstrated the impact of global developments and gave Mauritians of Indian origin the opportunity to become a force to be reckoned with.

The political advancement of the Mauritian Hindus in particular has represented the most serious challenge in both its direct effect – independence (see Chapter Four) – and in a more long-term sense – i.e. the ongoing struggles between the government and the Franco-Mauritians (see Chapter Eight). Franco-Mauritians were not oblivious to the dangers that the political advancement of (the descendants of) the indentured labourers would entail, as is shown by the fact that already in the late nineteenth century they objected to widening suffrage out of fear of losing their politically advantageous position (see Chapter Three). They could not, however, prevent this change from happening in the long run because they were easily outnumbered by Mauritians with other backgrounds who seized upon the opportunities that change was bringing them. This was a structural process brought about in part by the agency of the Hindus themselves and facilitated by the intervention of the British colonial power, which considered it no longer opportune to maintain a system of unequal political representation and as a consequence challenged the Franco-Mauritian elite position. The agency of Hindus who resisted Franco-Mauritian political dominance, in particular, indicates that the ascent of counter-elites was a major contributing factor to decline. As Dogan and Higley argue, ‘a change of political elites is possible only if there is an organized opposition and thus a reservoir of counterelites’ (Dogan and Higley 1998: 23). The wider structural change to which this was connected was the worldwide collapse of the colonial system, which undermined the white colonial elites in general, although opposition in the context of the Cold War sometimes also contributed to consolidating the

position of white elites. Most white elites were eventually either replaced by other ruling classes or lost their political power by the introduction of more representative democratic systems. The Franco-Mauritian case - like that of the patrician families in New Haven (Dahl 1961) - confirms that the direction of change has an impact on 'the justice (or fairness) of an elite system' (Marcus 1983: 70) and that stability over time was not guaranteed. The multidimensionality of structural change together with the agency of counter-elites and other sections of the population simply resulted in the loss of Franco-Mauritian political power and led to one of the defining events in Mauritian history, the independence achieved in 1968. The fact that Franco-Mauritians have maintained their economic power corroborates Dogan's analysis: 'the economic and administrative elites resist better the upheaval than the political and military elites' (Dogan 2003b: 13).

There seems, nevertheless, a tendency towards a more equal economic distribution. The thesis shows that this is difficult to accomplish even though the consolidation of economic power after Franco-Mauritians lost their (direct) political power has not been without its challenges either. One of the most significant challenges currently comes from political counter-elites and is the result of the changing balance of political power on the island emerging since the 1950s-1960s. Politicians did not accept the way politico-economic power is distributed and regularly challenged Franco-Mauritian economic power (see Chapter Eight). But the participation of other Mauritians in the private sector facilitated by, for example, the global demand for low-cost manufactured goods has also increased competition for the Franco-Mauritians. This, coupled with a nationwide focus on education, has especially challenged the elite position of Franco-Mauritian employees, with Franco-Mauritian businesses more and more often employing people on the basis of merit (see Chapter Five). Challenges, in this respect, are predominantly local as the impact of foreign investment has so far been limited – the increasing participation of foreigners, however, is in itself a potential threat to the Franco-Mauritian domination of the local economy.

Another *potential* challenge to the Franco-Mauritian elite position, of which the first onset has already been seen, has little to do with their economic position and counter-elites and comes rather from within the community itself. Marrying non-white Mauritians jeopardises the endogamous marriage patterns of the Franco-Mauritians and their exclusivity (see Chapter Six). While this phenomenon is still limited at the present time, if it increased significantly it would lead to the disintegration of their own group, at least in the form that they have known it up to now.

9.2 Practices to Counter Decline

The practices by means of which Franco-Mauritians have, both with and without success, faced the challenges to their position are diverse but inextricably linked. The social organisation of the Franco-Mauritian community, as a complex of identity strategies and ‘defensive’ social practices, has undoubtedly helped them to face the challenges of decline. This organisation has resulted in a closely-knit network of family and friendship relations, a fact physically expressed in their social clubs, *campements* and other areas of their exclusive private life (see Chapter Six). The evidence strongly suggests that the Franco-Mauritians have succeeded in organising themselves ‘particularistically’ (see Cohen 1981: xiii) and in establishing ‘horizontal loyalties’ (cf. Fennema 2003) between them extremely well. A strong sense of belonging appears to be a great asset when facing challenges and has helped prevent the Franco-Mauritian community from becoming ‘diluted’. They outdo their competitors in consolidating an ‘exclusive’ social environment because they seem to have a stronger sense of belonging and elite cohesion than the counter-elites. Their notable distinctiveness compared to other Mauritians also appears to contribute to co-operation among Franco-Mauritians in the private sector (see Chapter Five). This pattern perfectly fits into the picture that Cohen has sketched: ‘[c]losure is most effectively attained through the operation of a network of amity which knits the members of the elite together. Such networks are developed to coordinate corporate action informally through mutual trust and cooperation’ (Cohen 1981: 222). Coupled with a strong focus on quality education, this has facilitated the continuity of economic privileges within the Franco-Mauritian community.

As has been argued, different forms of capital, such as ‘social capital’ (Bourdieu and Clough 1996: 331) give elites access to influential networks and contacts not accessible to the majority of people (Westwood 2002: 49). Networks, as clearly illustrated by Wright Mills (2000 [1956]), Dahl (1961) and Domhoff (1978), are very significant in the construction and continuity of elite power. The Franco-Mauritian case confirms Shore’s argument that close attention to the elite kinship structures and networks of these groups is required in order to study how they ensure their survival (Shore 2002: 13). Despite serious challenges to their position, Franco-Mauritians have, indeed, maintained their historically rooted inside track into management positions, something which helps them to weather growing competition and the increasing participation of other Mauritians in the labour market. This cannot be adequately understood by only looking at, for example, formal business practices: looking at their exclusive socio-cultural patterns, the logic of employers for hiring other Franco-Mauritians because they trust them and because they know their family quickly becomes evident. Informal and other types of networking

are also very important (Camp 2003: 149) especially for understanding the resilience of networks in the face of change.

Franco-Mauritians have tended to focus strongly on their economic interests and via economic practices have consolidated their socio-economic elite position. This fact helps show that, as Shore argues, ‘elites can only be meaningfully understood in their wider historical context’ (Shore 2002: 12). Control over land has been historically determined (see Chapter Three) and by successfully investing in other areas of the economy and refusing to compete in too ruthlessly cut-throat a manner with one another, i.e. Dominique Dervillers’ ‘sportish rules’ (see Chapter Five), Franco-Mauritians have been able to consolidate economic power. Donating land to the government and making gifts to political parties as a means of maintaining good relationships (see Chapter Eight), also seems to help preserve economic power – thus delaying Franco-Mauritians’ overall decline as an elite.

Franco-Mauritian political practices have had limited success when it has come to facing competition from newly emerging (political and business) elites. Memories of the past tend to make few Mauritians directly in favour of Franco-Mauritians. Their economic power is considered a legacy of a contested colonial past and this conflicts with the voluntary aspect of consenting to authority: ‘[i]n a situation involving *authority*, “*B* complies because he recognises that [*A*’s] command is reasonable in terms of his own values” – either because its content is legitimate and reasonable or because it has been arrived through a legitimate and reasonable procedure’ (Lukes 1982 [1974]: 18). Obtaining vertical loyalties and assuming universalistic functions is thus not a simple matter for the Franco-Mauritians. Historically, the Catholic faith has helped them to connect with the Creoles in a remarkable alliance between ‘former slaves’ and ‘slave-holders’ (see Chapter Four and Seven). This was largely a rather paternalistic relationship since it was white Franco-Mauritians who dominated the Catholic Church. Since this has gradually been changing, though, the Catholic faith may yet encourage further collaboration. However, as was shown by the Franco-Mauritians’ loss of political power in the 1970s, this hardly mobilises tremendous amounts of support in the Franco-Mauritians’ favour. In a democratic society the small community of Franco-Mauritians is simply unable to wield sufficient (political) authority to compete with the Hindus. Franco-Mauritians struggled hard and did not easily accept defeat but they gradually realised that resistance was futile as they could no longer count on support from other Mauritians. Here my analysis departs from Sandbrook et al. (2007), Simmons (1982) and the politician Paul Bérenger in the 1970s, all of whom suggested that the loss of political power was the result of a deal. As for the Nepalese Rana elite (Lotter 2004) and many Central American elites (Robinson 2000: 95, 96), part of their success in facing challenges

of decline was derived from the fact that the Franco-Mauritians, recognizing changing realities, gradually ceded their political power. My work has illustrated that, although this was forced by circumstances, they were willing to share power with the newly emerging elites in order to safeguard their economic position.

Discursive Practices

Only a few Franco-Mauritians are now active in politics and Paul Bérenger, who was in the position to use his political clout (see Chapter Eight), can hardly be considered to have applied his political power to support Franco-Mauritians in facing the challenges to their position. Neither does Eric Guimbeau (see chapter Eight) now have the political power to change the course of events even though his rhetoric is illustrative of some of the discursive practices Franco-Mauritians engage in to resist impending decline. As Guimbeau said, ‘the politicians who attack the whites want to kick them out [of Mauritius] and take their place. It’s revenge for the past. ... But we have created a lot of work and invested a lot in Mauritius.’ These discursive practices involving styling themselves as victims are common among elites: ‘[o]ne would think by talking to the planters [in the Philippines] that they are the much-beleaguered objects of a government conspiracy to undermine them in every possible way’ (Billig 2003: 156).

These perceptions of elites as being under pressure show the importance of studying the elites’ own self-definitions. Franco-Mauritians often consider themselves victims and as not really so powerful as they are generally thought to be. This affects their behaviour since people’s subjective sense of power has a greater impact on their thoughts, feelings and behaviour than their objective sense of power (Bugental and Lewis 1999). Their internal discourse has an impact on the behaviour of elite members as well. Among the Franco-Mauritians the perception of being oppressed as victims of the Hindu politicians, for example with regard to the *campement* issue, has restricted the room available for expressing dissident opinions. Many Franco-Mauritians also said that, in principle, they adhered to the idea of the democratisation of the economy but that this support depended on what exactly this implies. They support the idea of ‘sharing the cake’ with everyone but claim that, in reality, the redistribution ‘is only for the benefit of Ramgoolam and his friends’. In the face of challenges to an elite position, these kinds of practices thus have a function. They increase elite cohesion, ‘suppress’ dissident opinion within the elite community and provide an excuse for inaction. By discrediting, with or without good reason, the government’s intentions the Franco-Mauritians create a situation in which they do not feel obliged to assist in the furthering of this policy; instead they aim at maintaining the status quo.

Discursive practices are also intertwined with other social practices, as we can see from Franco-Mauritian marriage patterns. Nowadays, Franco-Mauritians argue that their marriage patterns depend on class and cultural and educational difference and not on skin-colour *per se*. These do, indeed, overlap but there is a stronger focus on white skin-colour as a signifier than Franco-Mauritians would like to admit (they are perfectly aware of the negative connotations that come with the fact of preferring a 'white' partner). The discourse about *métissage* and the acceptance of foreign white spouses into the community illustrates the persisting influence of the meaning of white skin-colour. Physical appearance symbolises, as is demonstrated by Franco-Mauritian discursive practices, their elite distinction and also represents an addition to the socio-cultural differences that are set up over time (see Chapter Seven). The community's historical patrimony, then, distinguishes Franco-Mauritians from other Mauritians. As Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot have noted (1998: 327-379), this constitutes a common practice among elites: 'old' French elite families also place a strong emphasis on the family's patrimony, with family members transferring this on to future generations. That this also helps to face threats to their position is shown by the case of the twentieth-century Russian *nomenklatura*. Their long history created a strong drive and efficient 'tradition' for reproducing itself across generations, even after Communism had collapsed (Szelényi and Szelényi 1995: 631). Indeed, as in the case of the Franco-Mauritians the patrimony tends to reinforce horizontal loyalties and elite cohesion: the image of being the only elite is cherished since the colonial period is relatively recent. In this setting, 'marrying white' comes almost automatically. This is also the case in Jamaica where, as Douglass argues, '[elite members] tend to fall in love with someone like them' (Douglass 1992). Two cases of white insular elites, the Békés in Martinique (Kovats Beaudoux and Giraud 2002; Vogt 2005) and the white elite in Jamaica (Douglass 1992), are intriguingly comparable with the Franco-Mauritians in this respect. One view is that the distinctive feature of white skin-colour and a patrimony stressing (historical) class difference facilitated strong elite cohesion, something which in turn engenders the perpetuation of elite status.

The discursive practices in use appear to prevent thinking 'outside the box'. Despite a certain variety of opinions, such as those shown in the case of Paul Bérenger, most Franco-Mauritians adhere to the socio-cultural framework of their community. The community is, thus, characterised by a track-record of unanimity. Businessmen could easily challenge their own elite group and/or characteristics of their group such as endogamous marriage patterns (some actually do), as they have the financial means to be independent. Nevertheless, the fact that behaving in such a way involves running the risk of being excluded from family and kin makes most adhere to the community's socio-cultural logic. This confirms that, as an elite, the Franco-Mauritians are

not simply made up of those in command. ‘Average’ Franco-Mauritians are not merely bystanders passively belonging to a privileged group; by sharing practices and acting in a common cause with those in commanding positions they actually influence how challenges are faced. They are, therefore, an integral part of the elite and cannot be excluded as Scott suggests (Scott 2003: 156). Besides, the business practices of the ones in command are not only about economic principles as numerous Franco-Mauritian businessmen are also in charge of safeguarding the (economic) patrimony and cohesion of the family for future generations. That they look beyond their own direct interests is, I suggest, another argument in favour of the theory that the elite extends beyond those individuals in powerful positions.

9.3 Results, Context and Theoretical Reflections

My study has shown the ways in which Franco-Mauritians have developed various practices to face decline in order to achieve continuity of their elite position. These challenges and practices have to be understood holistically as they represent a complex concurrence of historical, social, cultural, economic and political developments and patterns. On the one hand, this is a combination of various constraints, patterns and developments unique to the Franco-Mauritian case. On the other hand, unravelling this complexity contributes to a better understanding of elites, elite decline and elite consolidation elsewhere. To conclude the thesis it is therefore relevant to more closely address five key paradigms for the study of elites: history, elite culture, structural phenomena, interdependency and power.

History

My historico-anthropological case study has made clear that the current position of the Franco-Mauritians can only be explained by closely examining the past, which once more confirms that ‘elites can only be meaningfully understood in their wider historical context’ (Shore 2002: 12). Not only does the past explain the basis of their historical domains of power, it also influences the discursive practices of the present. Franco-Mauritians perceive themselves as being of a (historically) different social class, which facilitates their sense of belonging and elite cohesion. There is even a certain elite tendency for ‘monumentalising the past’ in order to attain authority in the present (Herzfeld 2000: 234), as Franco-Mauritians name hotels and schools after historical figures. At the same time, relationships between the wider population and the Franco-Mauritians are influenced by the past in complex ways. I would thus argue that for a better understanding of elites it needs to be acknowledged that the role of the past in maintaining status is more ambiguous than an interpretation simply privileging the formation of the historical basis of power

would suggest. Mauritians, furthermore, both resent and emulate Franco-Mauritians who are, in turn, both openly challenged by politicians and associated with the ‘unfair’ colonial system. Franco-Mauritians often perceive themselves as victims of the past but in every-day interactions Mauritians still ascribe symbolic elite superiority to Franco-Mauritians’ white skin-colour – this can be seen by the way they are treated with a lot of formality by shop attendants, employees and servants. Equally, some Mauritians aspire to be friends with them. Since they are a tiny minority in a non-white society, these relationships continuously reaffirm a sense of distinction, with the Franco-Mauritians as superiors. Their elite status is, thus, also attributed to them by other Mauritians as a consequence of their historical position of power (similarities occur with the cases presented in this study on Jamaica and Martinique).

Reflecting on the importance of grasping the wider historical context in the light of my empirical evidence, I suggest that to fully understand relationships between elites and wider populations it is necessary to not only analyse the historical power base of elites but also the complex legacy of the past and its associated representations (in this case in Mauritian political and social discourses). While elite characteristics and symbols are emulated, influencing the consolidation of elite status, resentment may at the same time enforce challenges to an elite position, making relationships with the wider population notably paradoxical.

Elite Culture

The Franco-Mauritian case has shown that their historical class distinction cannot be separated from its cultural aspects. From earliest childhood Franco-Mauritians are raised with a sense of (historical) exclusivity achieved by means of sport clubs, *campements*, other leisure activities and the division of labour in the household, all these invoking a strong sense of belonging and a culture that distinguishes them from other Mauritians. Franco-Mauritians have handed down an interest in the sea and in hunting from generation to generation while a focus on business has also become part of the community’s culture. At the same time, culture can limit the elite’s capacity for flexibility in the face of change: the gradual process of the loss of political power and the example of *Le Cernéen* show how the Franco-Mauritians were accustomed to their role as hegemon and how they tried everything to maintain this position. For generations Franco-Mauritians had transferred their elite dominance down through the family so coming to terms with counter-elites who successfully challenged their power was not easily incorporated into their cultural framework. Thus it can be seen that cultural understandings that are transmitted to future generations and via which a pattern of cultural reproduction appears (Strauss and Quinn 1994: 284, 289, 291) are resilient. Only gradually did the Franco-Mauritians realise that their (in)direct

political role was finished in a democratic Mauritius, a change symbolically marked by the closing down of *Le Cernéen*, while their cultural patterns persisted anyway.

Franco-Mauritian position, privileges, status and power are better understood by looking at the long-term impact of elite culture. As for the Creoles in Sierra Leone (Cohen 1981), this explains cohesion, solidarity and subsequent continuity. Moreover, it explains the perpetuation of social inequality as Franco-Mauritians perceived themselves to have a different culture, something which helped them to consolidate a privileged position. In this respect, as Shore noted (2002: 5), it is fundamental in the study of elites 'to understand the way social reality is constructed by actors themselves; to grasp *their* conception of the world and the way they related to it as self-conscious agents'. Franco-Mauritian self-perceptions have illustrated the importance of culture in shaping their networks and furthermore in explaining their exclusivity as well as their room for manoeuvre within the confines of the community's socio-cultural logic. But elite culture, like the symbolic distinction of physical appearance, is also reinforced through emulation. Franco-Mauritians are associated with French (Western) culture. In a sense, the global hegemony of the West still positively impacts on their position in spite of the fact that France promotes French among all Mauritians. Mauritian emulation of France and the West is to the advantage of the Franco-Mauritians as they have historically been associated with this part of the world. The empirical evidence thus obviously shows the relevance of taking the distinctive culture of elites into consideration, as this significantly impacts on elite continuity and elite practices. Elites, like other social groups, are influenced by cultural behaviour patterns, habits and customs that are internalized, 'embodied' and passed from generation to generation in conjunction with the material benefits that are also passed down (Hartmann 2007: 105).

Structural Phenomena

The empirical evidence has also substantiated that the Franco-Mauritian elite position is dependent on structural phenomena as well. Due to the transition from the colonial period to independence, the colonial structure which had favoured the Franco-Mauritians collapsed. This partly changed their identification, because until then Franco-Mauritians were a racial elite marked by their white skin-colour, but were since then gradually portrayed as an ethnic community as well (which shows the constructivist nature of ethnicity). The strong focus in Mauritian society on ethnic differences can be considered a new structural phenomenon; one that, however, has been ambiguous in its effects. As Amy Chua (2003) has illustrated, ethnic elites all over the world find themselves in a difficult position when it comes to assuming 'universalistic' functions, especially vis-à-vis much larger ethnic groups. Even when the latter are

socially stratified, obtaining vertical loyalties nevertheless often proceeds via the path of ethnic affiliation. The Mauritian Hindu elite in the political domain is a prime example of this, as they are able to consolidate their position by creating vertical loyalties along ethnic lines (see Chapter Four and Chapter Eight) – thus gaining a favourable position in the authority structure, as explained above (cf. also Lukes 1982 [1974]: 18). Differences are marked with other ethnic groups on the island, either directly or indirectly. The agency of individuals, such as Noël Marrier d’Unienville, Gaëtan Duval, numerous other politicians, and a newspaper like *Le Cernéen*, is one cause of the institutionalisation of ethnicity. But nowadays politicians and others alike play an equally important role in sustaining ethnicity as a structural principle in society at large. In such a context, the legitimacy of elites like the Franco-Mauritians can get very problematic. The exclusivity and perpetuation of Franco-Mauritian elite culture and economic privileges cannot, therefore, be grasped without looking at structural phenomena.

The ambiguity of ethnicity is further evident in endogamous marriage patterns and the many ethnically exclusive characteristics of Mauritian private life, which exist in virtually all the communities and which are generally not challenged. These characteristics are considered to belong to the domain of symbolic ethnicity (Eriksen 1998: 185) and disqualifying them in terms of acceptability would be seen as jeopardising Mauritian pluralism, the foundation of independent Mauritius (see Chapter Seven). In a way, the symbolic elite distinction achieved via white skin-colour fits in the local culture. Daloz similarly shows how differences in ostentatious behaviour and modesty among political elites in Nigeria, Scandinavia and France are all shaped by cultural differences that fit in their respective countries (Daloz 2007). At the same time, endogamous marriage patterns (symbolic ethnicity) are inextricably linked with business practices (instrumental ethnicity). Socio-cultural exclusivity tends to perpetuate Franco-Mauritian business networks in the private sector: due to the persistence of these exclusive social networks Franco-Mauritian businessmen are evidently more easily drawn to each other meaning that other Mauritians get left out. Similar patterns are to be found among Hindus in the public sector and other Mauritians in the private sector. Thus, even though Mauritian society ‘does not approve’ of instrumental ethnicity, many Mauritians would argue that they are favouring their own kin because ‘others are doing it as well’. Creoles tend, for example, to demand the allocation of a fixed percentage of civil servant positions to the Creole community while Hindus tend to argue that they have to ‘help’ each other to find employment in the public sector because the Franco-Mauritians in the private sector will not employ them.

The structure of Mauritian society, in this respect, explains to a great extent the consolidation of the Franco-Mauritian socio-economic elite position. Mauritius is an ethnically

structured society which facilitates the maintenance of a distinctive Franco-Mauritian identity. Day-to-day contacts between Mauritians of different ethnic backgrounds tend to be friendly if only because politicians and government officials have to co-operate with Franco-Mauritian businessmen and cannot simply always behave in a hostile manner towards them. The small size of the island is certainly relevant in maintaining this situation as it is not conducive to widespread ethnic violence – the riots that occurred around independence and in 1999, for example, did not last long and ethnic reconciliation was quickly achieved immediately afterwards. This seems to distinguish the Franco-Mauritian case from the Afrikaner elite in South Africa which severed its ties with poorer Afrikaners in order to continue its position (Kalati and Manor 2005: 171, 172). Support along ethnic lines was much more stigmatised than in Mauritius and, as has been said, Franco-Mauritians' small numbers also form part of the explanation for the difference in behaviour, i.e. severing ties was a less evident thing to do because the community was a close-knit network.

Elite continuity is, in a sense, partly beyond the direct influence of elites themselves and structural phenomena, both global and local, have therefore to be taken into consideration. They determine who has and who can maintain power (or at least certain forms of power) as well as how power tends to be transferred to certain players. As has been noted by Brennan (1997), '[t]he capitalist entrepreneur's ability to enforce his will on the worker, for instance, is conditioned by the nature of modern capitalism. In point of fact, the entrepreneur is already in a structural power position' (Brennan 1997: 73). The colonial system similarly favoured Franco-Mauritians and this phenomenon became associated with their white skin-colour. The present phenomena related to ethnicity in Mauritian society impact on the island's power balance as well, since ethnicity is often used as an argument to discredit others (see Chapter Eight).

As has been argued, structural change has deprived numerous elites of their power. However, change does not always herald the complete collapse of elite power but sometimes its prolongation, as shown by the Franco-Mauritian case and those of a number of other elites – elite networks and elite culture actually appear to facilitate the resurfacing of elites in other domains or at least keep them powerful in more defined domains. Mexican elites, for example, survived the revolution, sometimes by intermarrying with newly emerging elites (Gledhill 2002: 44), a strategy that is in fact hardly noticeable among Franco-Mauritians. Elite family networks also demonstrated resilience after their initial downfall in Guatemala in the turmoil of the 1970s and 1980s when part of the (old) elite successfully linked up with transnational actors involved in processes of globalisation (Robinson 2000: 95, 96). Certain sections of the Rana elite in Nepal successfully secured their position within new power groups as well (Lotter 2004), while in the

Russian transition to post-communism enduring networks similarly facilitated elite continuity (Dogan and Higley 1998: 132; Böröcz and Róna-Tas 1995: 761). Thus in order to understand elite decline and/or continuity it is imperative that we address both the short-term and long-term impact of (local and global) structural phenomena.

Interdependency

The exacerbation of ethnic differences by politicians makes especially the Hindu community (the main force in the government and the public sector) suspect among many other Mauritians (see Chapter Eight). Even when some of their suggestions can be ‘objectively’ justified, politicians still seem to have an undeniable self-interest in portraying Franco-Mauritians as an elite unwilling to share its privileges because this way of presenting things gains them votes. Suspicion of politicians, in my opinion, plays in favour of the Franco-Mauritians, though, since they can consolidate their position due to the fact that there are sufficient counter-forces preventing their main competitors, the Hindu politicians, from seizing too much power. Preserving a precarious ethnic balance thus prevents Franco-Mauritians from being pushed aside; the Parsis (Luhrmann 1996), on the other hand, were more easily outdone by newly emerged elites because the changing Indian setting did not ‘protect’ them against rival counter-forces. Furthermore, in Mauritius power struggles between ethnic groups other than the Franco-Mauritians – for example, between Mauritian Hindus, originating from the north and the south of India – also divert attention away from them. In a way, Franco-Mauritians, with their small numbers, appear to be an abstraction. They are easy to single out and label in order to mobilise support during electoral campaigns but hardly a daily preoccupation since they are absent from or invisible in many parts of Mauritian society.

The Franco-Mauritian case has shown how different types of power are inextricably interwoven. Paradoxical relationships of rivalry and co-operation between Franco-Mauritians and Hindu politicians, but also between groups not involved with the Franco-Mauritians, explain a great deal of the present Franco-Mauritian position. This shows that for a good understanding of what challenges of decline elites face, and via which practices they address these in order to achieve continuity of their position, it is necessary to look at the interdependency existing between elites, counter-elites and the wider population, as well as at underlying social forces, both global and local. Elites are dependent on and connected to other social groups in their own society but, as is illustrated by the decline of the French language as a Franco-Mauritian symbol of elite distinction, also with social groups and events elsewhere. Elite continuity, in a sense, is partly beyond the direct influence of elites themselves. Sometimes, it seems, elites actually almost

get away with having only a few ‘universalistic functions’: they manage to prolong their stay in the privileged position because others are too preoccupied with their own power struggles to bother with them. In the study of elites, the relationships and mutual dependency between elites, counter-elites and the public, nationally and transnationally, should thus always be taken into consideration.

Power

Finally, the challenges that Franco-Mauritians face(d) confirm Scott’s remarks: ‘[o]ne of the errors made in much elite analysis ... has been to assume, or at the very least to imply, that elites are all-powerful and that organizationally dominant groups will hold all the other power resources of a society’ (Scott 2008: 38). Power is multidimensional, as has been rightly pointed out by various authors, and as I have argued the ‘weaker’ sides often actually determine the agenda. This is evident, for example, from elites’ anxiety about receiving too much public attention, underlining once more the importance of studying the elites’ own self-perceptions. Douglass noted that, ‘[p]eople in positions of power may fear that information about them might be used against them by their critics’ (Douglass 1992: 37). Numerous Franco-Mauritians questioned me about this during interviews, asking whether I was writing for local newspapers. Cohen’s remark that in liberal societies the particular interests of elites are, often, *secretly performed* is in line with this (Cohen 1981: xvi).

Reflecting upon theory about (elite) power I, therefore, advance that the exercise of power needs to be addressed in a slightly different analytical manner, one which will help contribute to our understanding of how elites face the challenges associated with the decline of their positions. Hence, to this end, I propose applying the analytical concept of ‘defensive’ power as used politico-economically, socially and discursively instead of assuming that elites use their power only pro-actively.

Throughout the colonial period, Franco-Mauritians built up a substantial power base (see Chapter Two) and when they were, as the hegemon, seriously challenged for the first time, they used this power to resist decline. Elites like the Franco-Mauritians thus appear to be able to ‘protect’ themselves from the tendency to decline, at least to a certain extent. In terms of Weber’s actor-oriented analysis of power, elites respond to the exercise of power by others and act in a way they would otherwise not have done. In this respect, they apply their power primarily to defend themselves. The gradual decline in political power of the Franco-Mauritians perfectly illustrates this. From the 1930s onwards, they resisted the challenges to their dominance with all

the means at their disposal but eventually had to accept defeat and lost their political power.³²⁰ Briefly put, Franco-Mauritians survived by effectively giving part of their hegemonic power away thus going from having multidimensional power (i.e. political, economic and socio-cultural power) to only having one-dimensional power (i.e. mainly economic power).

In the period since Mauritius gained its independence in 1968, using power defensively has come to be an oft-repeated strategy as shown by recent objections to changing the *campement* policy, the restructuring of the sugar industry and the democratisation of the economy. We can see, then, how gradually Franco-Mauritians came to realise that they stood little chance in power struggles with the government who could mobilise the electorate, a resource very useful in the exercise of power. To a certain extent they were able to apply their economic power effectively but they lacked the numbers and the popular support that contemporary politicians on the island have. In a way, they have settled for a decision to merely consolidate an elite position so as to prevent further decline, even though this gradually inevitably leads to more loss of power. This does not imply that elites, like that of the Franco-Mauritians, do not apply their power more pro-actively (and expansively) once they are under pressure and they are undeniably also successful in building alliances for economic development. Franco-Mauritian companies actively use their power in lobbying for favourable policies as was clearly shown by the first agreement to do with the restructuring of the sugar industry in 2006. Equally, they have successfully increased their power by investing in the hotel industry which has, in a way, given them additional (economic) power with which to consolidate their socio-economic elite position.

The Franco-Mauritian case, therefore, shows that power can indeed only be correctly understood by taking into consideration three elements: elite power itself (what kind of power an elite possess clearly matters because Franco-Mauritians could consolidate their position even though their political power declined), the power of counter-forces such as that of the wider population and counter-elites (here it also matters what kind of power they possess) and the influence of structural phenomena on power – structural phenomena, as I have argued, do not exercise power in the way that actors do but (as has been shown) can determine who has power as they often lead to the transfer of power to certain players. I have, moreover, argued how cultural practices, social organisation and discursive practices impact on power and the consolidation of an elite position. Self-perceptions are very relevant for an understanding of this

³²⁰ Elites may eventually negotiate away part of their power, yet initially they always seem to resist. This brings me to an interesting but difficult to answer question: is resistance strategically the right path? With hindsight, one would argue that Franco-Mauritians should have realised that they would, eventually, not stand a chance against a majority made up of, specifically, Hindus. Could they not have more directly accepted their political defeat for the sake of creating good relationships? Or would they have been considered weak and, as a consequence, have jeopardised their economic power and privileges as well? Would their opponents, in other words, have tried to increase their power even more had they not met any resistance? In that scenario, Franco-Mauritians would have been worse off without having applied their power defensively.

(‘defensive’ use of) power. Elites, rightly or wrongly, perceive themselves to be under threat and act accordingly, this also reinforcing solidarity and elite cohesion. They go up in arms when they perceive their position to be challenged and react defensively to such situations even though they then often end up gradually accepting the new realities that in many cases actually turn out to be not too disadvantageous for them anyway (conversely, more threatening changes seem sometimes to be harder to notice before it is too late). Elites may be considered all powerful but their behaviour can actually only be meaningfully understood by also addressing their anxieties and fears. Thus for a deeper understanding of elite power it is necessary to study the perspectives of the research subjects themselves, i.e. ‘from within’ (anthropology’s speciality). Arguments, however, about whether elites’ self-perceptions (positing internal diversity and lack of significant power) as opposed to other people’s perceptions of elites (as cohesive and all-powerful units) are actually accurate will probably always remain.